

RELIEF OF DISTRESS ON THE WEST COAST OF IRELAND.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

Sir,

H.M.S. "Valorous," Galway, 4th August 1880.

In compliance with their Lordships' Memorandum M., dated 10th July 1880, forwarded by you on the 12th of the same month, I beg to enclose a general summary of the relief stores supplied to this squadron by the several Relief Committees formed at the end of last year for the relief of distress in Ireland; this return also includes stores brought to this country from the United States of America in their frigate "Constellation," and which stores were conveyed to the Western Islands and coast populations by the several vessels forming the Relief Squadron, under the command of Rear-Admiral His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh.

The first of Her Majesty's ships detailed for relief service was H.M. gunboat "Goehawk," and she commenced her relief service on the 3rd of February last, followed by the "Orwell," "Bruiser," "Hawk," "Imogene," and this ship. These vessels were detailed by the senior naval officer at Queenstown to carry out the direction of the Committees:—The "Goehawk," "Orwell," "Bruiser," and "Imogene" for the service of the Mansion House Committee; the "Valorous" and "Hawk" for the service of Her Grace the Duchess of Marlborough's Committee.

This arrangement continued until the arrival of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, in H.M.S. "Lively," when he took command of the whole of the squadron, which was worked as the several Committees required, on application to him for a ship or ships, and has been continued on the same system, since the departure of His Royal Highness, under me.

It will be seen, on reference to the return, that since the first commencement of this service by Her Majesty's ships 856½ tons of meal, 458 tons of seed potatoes, 30 tons of oats and barley, and 110 hales of clothing, and a considerable quantity of loose clothing issued by H.M.S. "Lively" and "Valorous" have been conveyed to the several islands and those portions of the coast difficult of access, and that the population of the places so relieved amounts to the number, approximately, of 36,841.

I believe all these places have been relieved by the several Committees and other charitable organizations, in money and some stores, otherwise than through the Relief Squadron, especially by the Canadian Relief Committee, who have either supplied or are now supplying fishing gear and nets to the coast population, or at least to that portion who have registered fishing boats, as well as grants of money in aid of building fishery piers.

The "New York Herald" Committee have also sent money, fishing gear, or stores, jointly with other Committees, some of which stores have been conveyed by Her Majesty's ships.

The Boards of Guardians have also availed themselves occasionally of the services of the Relief Squadron to convey seed, &c., to the islands; but, generally speaking, with the exception of the cargo of the "Constellation," the Relief Squadron has almost entirely been employed in conveying the stores of seed, food, and clothing supplied by the Duchess of Marlborough's Committee and the Dublin Mansion House Committee.

I would now wish to offer a few remarks in accordance with their Lordships' directions, as given in the before-mentioned Memorandum.

From my own observation, also from letters I have seen, and conversations I have had, not only from officers commanding the several vessels employed on this service, but from others who live in the districts affected, I have not the slightest hesitation in stating that had it not been for the exertions of the charitable organisations during the early part of this year, some of the inhabitants of these western districts and outlying islands would have died from starvation; that I myself observed very many cases of extreme destitution in the spring of this year on the islands and portions of the

coast of Connemara my former reports will show; distress did not appear to have come suddenly from the failure of last year's harvest, but apparently had been getting worse and worse as the people each year had been getting poorer and poorer, until the crisis arrived last winter, when all credit having been stopped by the shopkeepers, and the potatoes that had been saved from last harvest having been eaten, the poorest were on the verge of starvation; it was then the Relief Committees came to these poor people's rescue in time to avert starvation.

From what I have seen and heard since I have been employed on this service, also from some little knowledge that I had picked up a few years ago on this coast, there are several causes which this recent distress may be attributed to, beyond the failure of last year's crops. The principal, I am of opinion, is the enormous population on the islands and certain portions of the coast; the land is very poor in most places, and from its proximity to the Atlantic the climate is exceedingly wet, and the crops raised are generally very indifferent; the holdings are also very small. I believe this overplus of population is to be attributed not only to the large families which are generally to be found on this coast, owing to the very youthful age, 19 and 20, which it is customary for the people to marry at, but also to the large sums realised by the collection and burning of seaweed into kelp, which induced numbers of people to settle on the islands and seacoast where the weed grew; and this industry was carried on for a number of years, until three years ago or so, when some other compound was discovered in South America, and reduced both the demand and price of this article; doubtless this has been one great cause of the recent distress on the coast.

As an instance of how this industry has fallen off, I may mention that on Tory Island, county Donegal, a few years ago, a population of about 300 people used to burn 250 tons of kelp a year, and receive for this money to the amount of 7*l.* per ton. This summer, on the same island, they burnt enough to realise 150*l.*, receiving only 2*l.* per ton.

In Connemara, in the Kilkierna district, up to four or five years ago, a sum of 15,000*l.* a year was paid for kelp; the last two or three years only from 2,000*l.* to 3,000*l.* have been paid a year for this article in the same district; and the whole coast is affected more or less in the same way.

In Donegal, Sligo, and Mayo the coast populations are more or less relieved in ordinary years by labourers going to England and Scotland to work for about three months in the year; but this is not the case in Connemara, where, from some cause, it is not the custom; probably it may be from the want of money to take them over. Certainly, of all the people I have visited this year, those living in Connemara appear the most destitute.

The kelp industry being almost at an end, and not likely to return to its former prosperity, there is nothing at present left for this large coast population to do except till the land, and fish; and as the land is not capable of producing sustenance for the people, there is only the fishing to assist them to live.

In Donegal there are some bank side fishermen, and these have been lately supplied with fishing gear by the Canadian Committee (as have a certain proportion of all the coast population); but, as a rule, they have only open boats to meet the heavy weather that is to be met with for two-thirds of the year on that stormy coast; therefore the fishing is and always must be to them uncertain, and a precarious means of support. In most cases they are too poor to procure large boats, and in some places, such as Tory Island, and similar spots, they have no harbour, nor would it be possible there, at all events, to make one; the boats, therefore, have to be hauled on shore in bad weather.

On the coast of Galway as a rule (with the exception of the Claddagh people) the fishing is now only a secondary industry, as most boat owners have a holding of land, and will not leave off their agricultural work at seed-time and harvest for fishing, and they also employ their boats for carrying turf and seaweed as a trade; besides they have no boats sufficiently well found to go and look for fish and enable them to keep the sea.

Their habits are, when the herrings or mackerel come into their immediate vicinity, to catch them, if they have nets (which in many places they have not). Of late years, that is to say, within the last two or three, it is stated these fish have not come close to the bays and islands in any quantity.

There are a certain number of people who catch lobsters and fish with lines, and doubtless earn money by it, as in the north steamers call at certain points to collect lobsters, turbot, &c., and on the Connemara coast there are fair markets at Westport, Clifden, and Galway for fish.

Why the fishing has fallen off of late years I have been informed is partly to be attributed to the profits made in the kelp manufacture, thereby inducing the people to collect seaweed.

At Roundstone I learnt that previous to the famine of 1847 a large herring fishery was there established, and that a number of schooners used to bring salt from English and Scotch ports for curing purposes, and return laden with cured fish; in fact the town of Roundstone owes its existence to this trade, but the fishing population were dispersed during the famine time, the nets either sold or rotted, and when times became settled again, through the introduction of kelp burning, the herring fishing was neglected. At present there are few fishermen in the district.

I have little doubt if capital was found a profitable fishery might be established on the coast, provided proper boats and gear were used, and that it was made a regular business of, which at present it generally speaking is not, as it is on the south coast, for I myself have seen some two or three years ago, off Blacksod Bay, the sea alive with herrings, and the boats of the Inishkea islanders (off which islands the fish were) were filled with herrings in a very short time, and this year herrings have been seen in Cashen Bay by the islanders, but they had no nets at the time to take them.

The crops this year on the whole coast are most promising, but yet, notwithstanding this, without something is done in the way of either reducing the number of the population now nearly entirely dependent on the land, or some means devised by which they can earn money, a renewal of the distress amongst the coast population is to be feared, especially if at any time the uncertain potato crop should fail.

I have endeavoured on my recent visits at several parts of the coast to ascertain if there was any actual distress yet existing, but happily the reply has been in the negative, the Relief Committees having been enabled to give food or money up to this time; and now the new potatoes are generally matured and fit for food.

Before closing this report I would mention the relief work that has been carried out by the Duchess of Marlborough's Committee, in the Kilkieran district, for the last six weeks; 2,200 men and women have been employed under the superintendence of Major Gaskell (the representative of that Committee) on road making and small boat work. For this work the people employed have been paid at the rate of one stone of meal per man per diem for five working days; and, having seen a great portion of the work, I am of opinion that it has been of great benefit to the people, having enabled them to leave their potatoes in the ground until they were matured, and also that many of the works are of a useful and permanent character. Some, however, I fear, have not been finished, owing to the time fixed for stopping the relief work, viz., the 1st August, having arrived before they were completed.

I have now returned from the last tour of relief service required of me by the several Committees, having, with the remaining ships of the Relief Squadron, distributed to the islands between Tory Island, on the coast of Donegal, and Baltimore, coast of Cork, inclusive, a donation of meal and a large quantity of clothing provided by the Dublin Mansion House Committee, and issued under the personal superintendence of Mr. Lane-Joynt, the representative of that Committee, who accompanied me in this ship.

I would, in conclusion, beg to bring to your notice the zealous manner in which all the officers and men serving in this squadron have forwarded the work they have been employed on since the squadron has been under my orders; especially would I mention Lieutenant Suckling, the Commander of H.M. gunboat "Goshawk," whose zeal and energy were untiring, and who has been carrying out these duties from the commencement, and in doing so had to encounter severe weather in very intricate and narrow waters.

Also Lieutenant Oldham, the Senior Lieutenant of this ship, who throughout displayed his usual energy and zeal. Lieutenant Maxwell, commanding H.M. gunboat "Brusar;" Mr. Evan Williams and Mr. Hughes, commanding respectively H.M. cruisers "Hawk" and "Imogene," did all in their power to further the service they were employed on.

I beg to enclose with the summary of cargo carried, list of names of places, with the population of the island and coast relieved by the Relief Squadron, from Tory Island to Baltimore inclusive.

Rear-Admiral R. V. Hamilton, C.B.,
Senior Naval Officer, Queenstown.

I have, &c.,
GEO. DIGBY MORANT,
Captain and Senior Naval Officer,
Galway.

NAMES and POPULATION of the ISLANDS relieved by the RELIEF SQUADRON from
TORY ISLAND to BALTIMORE, inclusive.

Name.	Families.	People.	Remarks.
Tory Island	68	300	
Inishboffin	About 24	120	
Gola and neighbouring islands	—	125	
Owey	40	200	
Crute			
Arannmore	200	1,140	
Mullinbeg, mainland	—	—	
Todin Bay, mainland	200	1,200	
Inish Mearry	10	50	
Leckla	—	—	
Polecheeny	—	—	
Inishgloria	3	32	
Inishkeen, North	25	132	
Inishkeen, South	42	180	
Newhammore	6	24	
Achill	—	5,000	
Clare Island	117	585	
Turk (Maye)	25	129	
Inish Bodin	158	969	
Inish Slank	46	213	
Inishbanna	13	83	
Triglaun			
Rowelann			
Inishdeglinmore	—	—	
Owey	40	208	
Turlot	35	164	
Turk	25	89	
Inishdegga	1	(7)	
Buacorra, mainland	—	800	

POPULATION of the ISLANDS from TORY ISLAND to CAPE CLEAR.

Name.	Families.	People.	Remarks.
Roundstone, mainland, including islands.	400	2,000	
Inishlarben	39	173	
Inishlone	83	430	
Bisc Island	5	25	
Cashel, mainland	400	2,000	
Carna, mainland	835	4,175	
Dea Island	1	7	
Muskeny	1	3	
Binnore	2	8	
Fynish	29	141	
Meenish	85	523	
Mason	26	130	
Rowenack, mainland	400	2,000	
Rowenack Island	22	110	
Inishcavan	24	150	
Araghavan	32	160	
Lecternmore	162	837	

Names.	Families.	People.	Remarks.
Erigh " " " "	2	19	
Inishbarragh " " " "	25	174	
Gormara " " " "	319	1,808	
Lisernallion " " " "	121	611	
Croppogh " " " "	5	34	
Shirk " " " "	7	58	
Furnish " " " "	31	156	
Dynish " " " "	15	76	
Carroon, mainland, not including islands.	600	3,000	
Part of Cosh, mainland " "	97	487	Six or seven in each family.
Inishmore " " " " }	700	3,500	
Inishmaan " " " " }			
Inishboe " " " " }			
Rhoskots " " " "	—	240	
Valencia Island " " " "	—	None.	
Island in Kenmare River " "	—	7	
Darvey Island " " " "	—	50	
Bean Island " " " "	—	700	
Whilag Island " " " "	—	None.	
Long Island " " " "	—	100	
Hare Island " " " " }	—	1,000	None.
Cape Clear Island " " " " }			
Sherkin Island " " " "			

GEO. DIGBY MORANT,
Captain and Senior Naval Officer,
Galway.

H.M.S. "Valorous,"
4th August 1880.

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